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EXTRACTS FROM THE MEMOIR OF ALVAN
STONE.

A YOUNG BAPTIST MISSIONARY TO ILLINOIS, WHO CAME
WEST IN 1831 TO WORK UNDER THE DIRECTION OF
REV. J. M. PECK—HE DIED AT EDWARDSVILLE,
ILLINOIS, FEBRUARY 13, 1833.

(From the Diary of Mr. Stone, Goshen, Mass, Dec. 25,
1830.)

“I now come to the main subject of my letter, and enter upon it without a preface. I have come to the decision to go to the West in the spring, should nothing occur more than I now know of. It seems a great way to go from friends and alone, too; but I think I can be more useful there than here, and why should I not go? I have received letters from Rev. J. M. Peck, Rock Spring, Ill. and he says, “If you come at all, come soon; come before you get your education.” * * *

June 4, 1831. Came in sight of the Mississippi, at the mouth of the Ohio. Went on shore and into a log cabin. People sprightly, but not one able to read, and no Bible. The land excellent, but fever and ague prevail. Cane grows luxuriantly. Deer, bears, wolves, turkies, and wild honey abundant. Informed by a Missourian that Baptists are much the most numerous in Missouri. The waters of the Mississippi are very turbid.

'5. One fellow passenger has hope, but has not made profession. Some enjoyment in conversation with him.

There is great want of schools in Kentucky, Illinois and Missouri. Why am I not better prepared to act in the world? O, my leanness, my leanness! And yet I may go to the living Fountain.

'6. Arrived in St. Louis at 8 A. M. Looked round the city for three or four hours. There is a court house, jail, Catholic college and chapel, Presbyterian meeting house, Methodist meeting house, and market. Arrived by stage at Rock Spring, at 4 P. M.'

With this place he was much disappointed; for instead of a flourishing village, he found not a dozen buildings to constitute the far-famed Rock Spring; and the literary seminary was no more.

After his arrival at Rock Spring, he was occupied several weeks in transcribing for the press Rev. J. M. Peck's "Guide to Emigrants," since published in Boston; while at the same time he formed acquaintance in that country, and improved his mind among the volumes of a valuable and extensive library, and in the printed correspondence of that pioneer of the West, the editor of the "Western Baptist."

* * * *

Rock Spring, Ill., June 9, 1831.

'You will see by the date of this, that I am at the place of my first destination. I arrived here on the 6th, and am now in the enjoyment of good health.

* * * *

There are but few settlements on the banks of the Ohio below Louisville. New Albany on the north side just below the falls, is increasing rapidly. Saturday morning came in sight of the Mississippi. The Ohio water is quite as muddy as your saw mill stream in a freshet, but the Mississippi is very muddy and discolored. Our only drink was the water from both these rivers. The Missouri side of the Mississippi is much more handsome, having bolder banks than the Illinois side. We arrived at St. Louis on Monday the 6th of June. After looking round

the city, I took the stage for this place, which is 17 miles east of St. Louis. In my route I passed what is termed the 'American Bottom,' which is, I should think, two or three miles across before coming to the bluffs. The soil is about 25 feet deep, and as rich as could be made of the best manure. It is very unhealthy. After passing the bottom, I rose a bluff of one or two hundred feet and came on to the 'barrens' and 'prairies.'

* * * *

'Rock Spring is on what is termed third rate land; yet I should think from the appearance of the soil and productions, that it is equal or superior to any farm in Goshen. The water at this place is nearly as good as father's well. The springs here, together with the ledge near, probably gave it the name of Rock Spring.

'I am at present engaged in writing for Mr. Peck. I study a little and read considerable, having access to a well chosen library and 30 or 40 periodicals weekly (mostly newspapers) from every part of the United States. It is now the busiest time of the year, as they are ploughing out their corn. They do not hoe it.

* * * *

'Rock Spring, Ill. July 27, 1831.

* * * *

'A few young brethren present at the Baptist Union Meeting in Edwardsville which closed yesterday, got together to consult with regard to ways and means of promoting the cause of Christ. We formed ourselves into a union called the Young Men's United Brethren Society of Illinois. The sentiment of the whole meeting was, "Let us do something."

* * * *

To his brother, Mr. A. S. Jr.

'Ridge Prairie, Ill. Aug. 9, 1831.

'This settlement is about 6 miles north of Rock Spring, and 12 south of Edwardsville. It is called as healthy a

situation as any in Illinois. There are many things in this country which I like, and many which I dislike. Notwithstanding the fertility of the soil, one can travel at less expense in New England than here. Although the land is level, the roads are poorer and more dangerous than those over the Green Mountains. There are steeper ascents on some of the largest stage roads here, than can be found on the road from Boston to Albany. This is frequently the case in crossing ravines and branches at right angles, where advantage might be taken of the ground by crossing obliquely. Where there is any descent the roads wash very much. I lately passed the road between the Prairie du Rocher and Kaskaskia, which is most of the way directly under the bluffs with a gentle rise and fall alternately, and in many places so bad, that it was with difficulty the carriage could be kept right side up.

‘Sudden changes of the weather are frequent, and the nights have been uniformly much cooler than in New England, blankets and comfortables not being oppressive. It must be admitted, I think, after all that is said by some to the contrary, that the country is not so favorable to health as New England.

* * * *

‘There is one objection to this country which will ever remain, the want of streams of pure water, and consequently of mill seats; for the streams are muddy and often stagnant, falling so little as to furnish no mill seats. The mills are propelled by horse, ox, or steam power. The steam saw mills run very prettily and do a smart business. Ox mills are constructed on the principle of the inclined tread wheel, and are much the most common for grist mills, carding machines, &c.

‘With regard to soil, no country in the world probably can boast superior. The ‘bottoms’ are called the first rate land, the ‘prairie’ the second, and the ‘barrens’ the third. Yet if the best farm in Williamsburgh could be

covered two feet in depth with the soil from the barrens, it would do no injury. You might take every ingredient you can find for the purpose in W. and compound them in the best manner to form a rich earth, and you could not form one superior to that of that part of Ridge Prairie in which I am now situated. The prairie here varies from one half to one mile and a half in width, well timbered on each side. In passing through the corn fields, one is obliged to look up to see the ears, and I have seen some that a man could not *reach* with his hand.

‘This part of Illinois has been peopled chiefly with emigrants from Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee. The state of morals is generally very low, yet there are many pleasant families in this region, some having come to free themselves from the influence of slavery. There is a great change taking place in some of the western slaveholding states with regard to slavery, and many feel anxious to rid themselves of the evil.

* * * *

‘When in Massachusetts, I have heard reports from this country representing it as every thing desirable, and other reports declaring it the worst of all lands, and both from respectable sources. I have been frequently at loss to know how to reconcile these contradictions; but it is now perfectly obvious. Imagine yourself trudging along a dusty prairie road in the middle of a hot summer’s day, with the heat of an almost vertical sun pouring on you. Not a shade near; not a breath of wind to move the sultry air, which seems close enough to stifle you. You come to a little low log hut, which you can see through between the logs in a dozen places, without a tree to shelter it from the hot sun, which darts its beams upon it with sufficient power to nearly set it on fire. Perhaps a rickety fence surrounds a patch of ground, where the tall weeds have the mastery of whatsoever may have been planted. In the house, you will see a parcel of pale dirty children, some of them shaking in the rags with the ague; the wife

a half naked disconsolate skeleton of a woman, and the husband stretched on a miserable bunk scorching with fever. You need travel but three or four such days, and make but a few such calls, before you are prepared to represent death and destruction as reigning triumphant in the land.

‘On the other hand, conceive a road winding among the trees, and yourself riding along it, towards the close of a pleasant day in autumn; the wild plums or the grape bending the trees over your head beneath them. You come to a house situated in a grove skirting the margin of a rich prairie. You call, are made welcome, and feel yourself at home. You see acres of the stoutest corn, a granary with hundreds of bushels of wheat, and cattle almost without number. You may at such a time and place see all that is desirable in a country, without seeing any of its evils; and you would be led from this to conclude it was in fact the promised land. Even when seen under certain circumstances and at some seasons, in its natural state, it presents attractions superior perhaps to any other country.

* * * *

‘Ridge Prairie, Bethel settlement, Ill.

Sept. 1, 1831.

‘I am well, for which I desire to thank God. I am teaching a school of about 25 scholars, in a very pleasant neighborhood, perhaps as much so on every account, as can be found in Illinois. My school is held in a meeting-house of the Emancipating Baptists, and is most delightfully situated in the edge of a pleasant wood, up to which the wheat fields come, as smooth as Northampton meadows and richer. The wood is black walnut, hickory, persimon (which bears a very good fruit,) oak, etc. Grape vines overspread the trees. Wild plums are very abundant; they are a very rich fruit, better than any cultivated plum that I ever ate; they are about the size of a partidge’s egg, red, and taste somewhat like a peach and

some like a cherry. There are acres covered thick with them. I frequently see wild turkeys. Deer are not plenty, though killed occasionally.

'Monday, Sept. 5. I am now at a meeting of the Baptists called Emancipators, which commenced last Friday. (The Emancipators differ from other Baptists only on the subject of slavery.) The congregation has increased to about 1,000, many of whom are anxious to know what they must do to be saved, and some have been brought into the glorious liberty of the gospel.

* * * *

Ridge Prairie, Bethel settlement, Ill.

Christmas eve, 1831.

* * * When my school closes, my present calculation is to study under the tuition of father Loomis at Alton.

'This settlement is advancing in improvement in various things. They are mostly Emancipators, and have two of the ablest preachers of the denomination. Some who were violently opposed to temperance societies, tract and missionary operations, have lost their prejudice. We have lately procured 15 dollars' worth of S. S. books, and money for a large stove in the meeting house. From recent visits to several families, I think our Sabbath school will be larger than in the summer.

* * * *

'Dec. 31. Took my farewell of coffee in the morning. Started early for Rock Spring and arrived before breakfast. Worked at the press with brother Smith till 12 o'clock when meeting commenced. Fourteen preachers present. Became acquainted with brother Bartlett and wife, with whom I had a pleasant interview.

* * * *

'Jan 15, 1832.

'Sunday school organized with 54 scholars. Brother Joseph Lemen preached.

* * * *

April 20, 1832. Went to Rushville. Fell in company with a man from Jacksonville, who is not a professor. Hundreds of non-professors live on the failings of professors. This shows the importance of professors living in accordance with their profession. Met a cordial welcome at brother Logan's. Conversed on the state of affairs, and the churches of the "Military Tract." The fields are truly white for the harvest.'

Rushville, Schuyler co. Ill.

April 21, 1832.

* * * I have been to Kaskaskia, and Waterloo the shire town of Monroe county, spent about a week in Edwardsville and Alton, and am now, as you see by the date of my letter, at Rushville, the county seat of Schuyler county. This is a fine country of land, and settling rapidly. The prairies are rich, the timber is good, the streams pure, with rocky beds. When I started from Edwardsville, I intended passing through Schuyler, Fulton, the lower part of Knox and Peoria counties, before I returned, but was unable to travel.

'The Mormonites are making progress in this state, and numbers of deluded fanatics are joining them, and preparing to set off for their New Jerusalem, which they say lies in Jackson county, Missouri. They preached in the neighborhood where I have been teaching, and a number were favorably disposed to their doctrine. After they were gone, a certain individual, a Methodist exhorter, followed a number of miles, in order to join their sect in full by being baptized by them. He rode with such speed as to soon tire his horse, when he dismounted and ran on foot. He at last overtook them, was baptized and ordained a Mormonite preacher. On his return, he attempted to perform a miracle, by walking on the water of Silver creek, which was then very high. He arrived safe at the other shore. His ability to swim, however, not his faith, saved him. He became violently deranged; and on reaching home, commenced destroying his property. An

elegant fancy clock was first demolished and committed to the flames. French bedsteads, tables, trunks, chairs, &c. followed in succession. And strange as it may appear, his wife, instead of attempting to hinder him, seemed actuated by the same spirit and joined in the work of destruction by burning a large stock of clothing, the fruits of her industry for years, and broke her tea sets and other ware. The neighbors arrived just as he commenced knocking off the roof and weather boarding of his house. He has been confined most of the time since. His language is dreadfully profane. His conduct and that of his wife blasted the hopes of Mormonism in this region for a season.

* * * *

'April 26. At Beardstown made some inquiry with regard to Sunday schools, and felt somewhat stirred up on the subject. Determined to visit every professor in the place. Mr. Fink, a Methodist, entered deeply into the subject, and accompanied me in my visits to the remainder of the professors, all of whom we found favorable to Sunday schools. Ten met in the evening, and pledged themselves to use their influence and effort in the cause. Found 15 professors in the place.

* * * *

Edwardsville, Ill., June 24, 1832.

* * * 'Tell the Sunday school children that the children here are not as highly favored as they are. I was in a place a short time since on the Illinois river, where lived two little boys, one nine. the other eleven, who regularly on the Sabbath paddled across the Illinois and walked eight miles to a Sabbath school to learn. This was the only opportunity they had of learning to read, and this is better than some have.

* * * *

I was lately on an excursion to the "Military Tract."

* * * *

A minister, a Baptist preacher, the most efficient one on the Military Tract, and I had almost said, the only one; a man who, for his love of the souls of men, has sacrificed 900 or 1000 dollars; and who, unless he is helped more efficiently from abroad, will, by his exertions in the cause of Christ, reduce himself to absolute want; a man who in youth had no opportunity of education, who now thirsts for information, but has not the ability to procure books and other means; one who rents his little prairie farm of 40 acres, and travels over Schuyler, Fulton, Knox, McDonough, Adams, and Pike counties, preaching, constituting churches, baptizing, distributing tracts, advocating Sunday schools, temperance societies, and all the benevolent movements of the day.

* * * *

'My feelings were strongly enlisted in favor of the Military Tract. I was better pleased with the natural situation of the country, than with any other part of Illinois that I have seen.

* * * *

'I conform to all the unessential forms of the western people; in short, I have got to be a very good "Tucky Ho." I can eat bacon for breakfast, bacon for dinner, and bacon for supper. I can say, "I reckon," instead of "I guess," "a heap," instead of "many" or "very much," "sort o'," instead of "kind o';" but I have not adopted "caze," instead of "because," and some other words in the Kentucky vocabulary, which are yet lacking in my dialect. I am fond of "waffles" and "flitters" and "hoe cake" and "corn pone;" and can in meeting sing almost as loud as a Kentucky negro. This last in some places is an indispensable requisite. Thus you see that I have not been wholly without improvement, since coming to this country.

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The Seminary is to be located at Alton. 240 acres of land have been already entered for it. The trustees are to be appointed by the State Convention or Union Meeting, as it is called, and the Northern Baptist Education Society, in New England, half by each. A building is to be put up immediately.

* * * *

July 4, 1832. Independence. Rained hard in the morning. Sunday school met, formed a procession, and marched to the court house. Singing and addresses.'

Mr. S. was one of the speakers.

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July 29. Attended the Sunday schools at Hump Ghent and Estabrooks.

* * * *

On the 13th of November, Mr. S. set off on a journey to the upper counties of Illinois, in hope thereby to recover his broken health.

* * * *

On the 20th he stopped at a Quaker tavern on the Mackinaw. In his journal he says, "Talk, talk, talk; yet very polite and obliging. Things in New England style more than I have seen before."

* * * *

Rushville. Schuyler co. Ill.

Dec. 3, 1832.

* * * Tazewell county in point of soil is much superior to the far famed Sangamo; but a great proportion of it is prairie, and most of the prairies very large. Where there is timber, it is better than in the counties below. Pekin, the present county seat, is on the river. I went considerably out of my way to see it; and whether it was owing to the reports I had heard of its unhealthiness, or the disagreeable weather of the day I visited it, or some other cause, I cannot tell, but from some cause, I was not at all pleased with the place.

* * * *

‘From Bureau I crossed southwest to the Galena road, part of the way on an Indian trail or path, and part of the way without any.

‘Were I a farmer intending to settle in Illinois, if I could get a number of families of the right kind with me, I would settle on the extreme head of Spoon river. I have seen considerable of Illinois, and that which is called the handsomest and best, but I have seen none that I liked so well as the head of Spoon river. The prairie is beautiful and the timber excellent. I did not go through the timber, but was told by one who had been through it, that it was five or six miles broad. The growth is oak, hickory, black walnut, maple (here called sugar tree) and some others. One great obstacle to the prosperity of the Military Tract is, so much of the land being owned by speculators, who either cannot be found, or if known, hold the land so high that it cannot be purchased. This grove and prairie which I have mentioned is Congress land, and can be had at the price of public lands. It is about 12 miles from the Galena road, and will for a great length of time have an unbounded and excellent range for cattle. Cattle and provisions generally find a ready market at the mines. The greatest objection to this place at present would be its frontier situation, if the Indians should be troublesome.

‘Knox and Peoria are liable to the same objections with Putnam and Tazewell; too much prairie. Fulton county is well watered and timbered. Canton and Lewiston, the latter of which is the county seat, are thriving little places. Schuyler is also well timbered. Rushville, which three years ago contained three or four log cabins, and from 25 to 30 souls, now has an elegant brick court house, brick school house, steam mill, three stores, many handsome frame and brick houses, and from four to five hundred inhabitants.

* * * *

Mr. Stone died February 13, 1833, but a short time after this letter was written.

“The following beautiful lines are from the pen of a special friend of our deceased brother, Mrs. Sarah H. Bartlett, wife of Rev. G. Bartlett, missionary to Illinois:

‘O harp, unused in melody to sing,
In funeral numbers one sad string awake,
And chant the requiem of virtue dead.

‘Scarce had young WOODSON sunk beneath the hand
Of Death; ere STONE, not less than he beloved,
Followed his spirit to the world unknown.
Both left the dear delights of native land
With all its nameless sweets, in hopes to find
In this fair land, beneath the setting sun,
Another home; but *Death* relentless came,
Marked them his prey, and sent them to the tomb.
They died, alas! without one kindred dear
To hang in suffering fondness o’er their beds,
Watch their faint pulse, beguile the tedious hours,
Wipe from their pale cold brows the damps of death,
Or point their agonizing souls to heaven.

* * * *

‘Desire to spread afar the Saviour’s name,
Led STONE away from all that blessed his youth,
To the “Great Valley” of the “distant West,”
Replete with nature’s richest, fairest gifts;
Which proved, too soon, alas! his early grave.

* * * *

Edwardsville, March 6, 1833.

MELVINA.’